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Sandwich Law Office Fire Sparked by Lightning

State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan and Sandwich Fire Chief George Russell said that the most probable cause of the early morning fire at 88 Route 6a in Sandwich was a lightning strike. Witnesses described a lightning strike in the area. The building housed three law offices including that of State Representative Cleon H. Turner who represents the First Barnstable district.

The fire was jointly investigated by members of the Sandwich Fire Department and the Sandwich Police Department and State Police assigned to the Office of the State Fire Marshal. Investigators spent hours conducting a forensic scene examination and interviews today. The evidence was consistent with a lightning strike and no evidence was found to point to any other cause.

Coan said, "Lightning is a powerful and unpredictable force of nature. We cannot prevent lightning strikes, only reduce the likelihood of one."

Chief Russell said, "Report any potential lightning strike to the fire department right away. Even if you see no evidence of a fire, one could be smoldering inside the walls or attic for a long time." He added, "Fire departments can use thermal imaging technology to detect smoldering fires before they cause a lot of damage."

Prevention Tips

- Make sure your electrical system is properly grounded; contact a licensed electrician. Make sure antennas and satellite dishes are properly grounded (licensed installers should have done this at time of installation).
- Do not keep tall trees close to a building.
- Use power surge protectors for important electronics.

Storm Safety Tips

- Unplug appliances during a storm to protect them and to remove possible sources of ignition if the house is struck.
- Get inside a building or car during a lightning storm; do not stand under trees.
- Stay off landline telephones and the wired computers.
- Assume all wires on the ground are electrically charged. This includes cable TV feeds.